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### VIRGINIA IN 1771.

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This letter was addressed by Colonel Richard Bland, uncle of Theoderick Bland, of the Revolution, to Thomas Adams, at that time in England. It gives an interesting account of state of affairs in Virginia in 1771. The original is among the Adams Papers, Virginia Historical Society Collections.

Virginia, August 1st, 1771.

Dear Sir:

When I saw you last, I think I had your promise not to be unmindful of an old acquaintance, who will receive particular Pleasure to hear, from you, of your health, and to have an account of what is transacting, on the other side of the atlantic, particularly relative to America.

To remind you of this Promise is one occasion of this Letter; the other is, to give you a narrative of the most interesting Events that have happened since you left us. And if, in doing this, you Find me, like most old Fellows, fond of Garrulity, I beseech you not to impute it as an Incident of old age, but to a

desire to oblige you; since, I know, it will be agreeable to you to hear of what is transacting in your native Country.

Upon the 27th of May a most dreadful Inundation happened in James, Rappahanoçk, & Roanoke Rivers, occasioned by very heavy and incessant Rains, upon the mountains, for ten or twelve days; during which time, we, in the lower part of the Country, had a serene Sky without the appearance of a cloud. The Rivers rose to the amazing Hight of forty Feet perpendicular above the common Level of the Water. Impetuous Torrents rushed from the mountains with such astonishing Rapidity that nothing could withstand their mighty Force. Promiscuous Heaps of Houses, Trees, men, Horses, Cattle, Sheep, Hogs, Merchandize, Corn, Tobacco & every other Thing that was unfortunately, within the dreadful Sweep, were seen Floating upon the Waters, without a possibility of their being saved. The Finest Low-Grounds were ruined; and many of the best Lands totally destroyed. Those which escaped the best, being, like the Deserts of Arabia, covered with large Bodies of White Sand, in many places six Feet deep. Three thousand hogsheads of Tobacco were lost From the Public Warehouses and about the same number from the different Plantations upon the Rivers. The total Damage, to the Country, is computed at two millions Sterling, & I do not think it is much exaggerated.

This severe Stroke occasioned a meeting of the assembly, to provide for those Sufferers whose Tobaccos were lost from the Public Warehouses, which, by our Law, must be made Good.

The assembly, at the very earnest Solicitation of the merchants, (who were the most considerable Sufferers in the Tobacco lost from the Warehouses) have emitted £30,000 in Treasury notes, redeemable, by adequate Taxes, in four years; which has given the merchants great Satisfaction; and their Eulogies, upon the House of Burgesses, are sung in all Companies.

I cannot but remark, upon this occasion, the different Conduct of the Merchants at this Time, & during the last War. When we were invaded by a Foreign Enemy, and were called upon, from time to time, by the Royal Requisitions for Supplies to defend the Country; & to cooperate with the King's Regular Troops in their several Expeditions; when the colony was exhausted of all its Specie; and could not borrow the Sum of

£10,000, upon the best Securities, altho' they offered an Interest of 6 per Cent, and, would have given 8 per Cent, rather than have been concerned with Paper money; When, under these Circumstances, we were *Forced* against our Inclinations to emit Treasury notes, or refuse to comply with the Royal Demands; the merchants raised such a Clamour, and represented the House of Burgesses, by their memorials to the Board of Trade & Plantations, in such dark and disadvantageous colours, that they drew very severe, and, as time has demonstrated, very unjust Censures from that Board, upon the Conduct of the Assembly: and they did not desist till they procured an act of Parliament restraining the Governor from giving his assent to any act of our Legislature, for making Paper Bills of Credit a legal Tender. But now, when their *private* Interest is affected; when they are in danger of Bankruptcy, and their Credit is likely to be Injured, they are become the warmest and most Forward Solicitors with the Assembly for that very Species of money, they abused the Assembly for emitting to defend the Colony from a Common Enemy. Such is, and such for ever will be the conduct of men who prefer their own Interest to the Public Good.

And now I am upon the Subject of Paper money, I will take the Liberty to inform you that of £750,000 issued in Treasury notes in the Course of the last War, only £103,000 is in circulation upon the Supposition that none of the money issued has been lost: but it is certain a large Sum has been destroyed by different Casualties; so that, by the best computation not more than £60,000 is in actual circulation; and the merchants are become so very Fond of it, that, tho' the Time of its redemption has long since expired, they exert every endeavour to prevent its being paid into the Treasury, from whence, they know, it will never more make its appearance, but must be burnt by a standing Committee appointed for that purpose. It really affords diversion to those who remember their Former opposition, to see their anxiety to keep this money in circulation, against the repeated advertizements of the Treasury, in our public Papers, calling upon the Holders of it to carry it in, and exchange it for Gold and Silver; which not one of them can be prevailed upon to comply with.

Our Export of Tobacco will be at least 6,000 hhds short of

what it would have been had not this misfortune happened. And you may depend it will be considerably Shorter the ensuing Year, as no Tobacco can be made upon the Low-Grounds, where such large Quantities used to be made; and the heavy and almost continual Rains since the Fresh, have destroyed great part of that which was growing upon the high Lands. But let me Find out another Subject.

You know Mr. Howocks, who, by a Fortuitous Concatenation of Events has been advanced to many profitable appointments in this Country. He is just gone for England, as he says, for the recovery of his Health. Before he left us, he called a Convention of the clergy, as Bishop's Commissary, to consider, as he himself expresses it, of the *Expediency of an American Episcopate*. Our clergy, I believe, are about one hundred; of these, only Eleven obeyed his Summons. But notwithstanding the smallness of the number they proceeded to consider this important Question; Eight (of which number Mr. Howocks was one) were for the *Expediency*, and four against it. After much Jangle & Disputation—Formal Protests were published in the Gazettes, by the four Protestors, against the legality as well as regularity of the Proceeding. This brought on a severe Paper War. Mr. Camm, Rector of York-Hampton & one of the Professors of Divinity in our College, commenced Champion for a Bishop; and Messurs Henly and Gwatkin, the two Professors of Philosophy, appeared in the Field of Battle against a Bishop. This war continued with much violence, & personal abuse, 'till the meeting of the Assembly; When the House of Burgesses put an end to it, at least Publickly, by declaring, unanimously against the *Expediency of an American Episcopate*; and returned their thanks to the four Clergymen for opposing a measure, by which much disturbance, great anxiety, and apprehension, would certainly take place among his Majesty's Faithful Subjects in America.

And indeed, my Friend, if this Scheme had been effected, it would have overturned all our Acts of Assembly relative to *ecclesiastical* Jurisdiction: most of which acts have received the Royal assent, and have existed, amongst us, almost from the First establishment of the Colony.

By these acts, our Vestries, who are the Founders of our

Churches, are made the Patrons within their several Parishes. Like Donatives in England, the Vestries have a Right to nominate any clergyman, as their minister, "who produces, to the Governor, a Testamonical that he hath received Ordination From *some* Bishop in England." And every clergyman so nominated and received by the Vestry in any Parish, is entitled to all the spiritual & temporal Benefits of his Parish as much as if he had been Formally admitted, Instituted & Inducted by a Bishop.

It is true, if a Parish continues vacant above a year, in that case, the Governor, as exercising the Right of the Supreme Patron within this Dominion, is empowered to collate to such vacant Parish; but in no instance has he a Right to interfere, if the Vestry receives a minister within the year after the Vacancy happens.

Besides, the King has assented to the act of assembly, which declares that the General Court shall "take cognizance of, and have Power and Jurisdiction to hear and determine all causes, matters and Things whatsoever, relating to, or concerning any Person or Persons, ecclesiastical, or civil; or to any Person or Things of what nature soever the same shall be." So that our whole *Ecclesiastical* Constitution, which has been Fixed by the King's Assent, must be altered, if a Bishop is appointed in america with any Jurisdiction at all; which will produce greater Convulsions than anything that has ever, as yet, happened in this part of the Globe. For let me tell you, a Religious Dispute is the most Fierce and destructive of all others, to the peace and Happiness of Government.

I remember the learned Author of the Commentaries upon the Laws of England, says, that, if upon the Reformation of Religion, under Henry the 8th, & his Children, the spiritual Courts had been re-united to the Civil, the old Saxon Constitution, with regard to *Ecclesiastical* Polity would have been completely restored in England. And he seems to lament that this re-union had not been Effected.

If then we have been so happy as to establish this Polity, and to re-unite the Ecclesiastical & Civil Jurisdiction in our Courts, it is I think, the highest Presumption in Mr. Howocks and his seven associates, to attempt so considerable an alteration in our Constitution as the Introduction of a Bishop must produce, with-

out consulting, nay, expressly contrary to the consent of the Legislature of the Country.

I profess my self a sincere Son of the Established Church; but I can embrace her Doctrines, without approving of her Hierarchy, which I know to be a Relick of the Papal Incroachments upon the Common Law. I have dwelt the longer upon this Subject because it is thought by some amongst us that Howock's Errand to England is to lay a Foundation for this Establishment; and that he expects to be the First Right Reverend Father of the American Church. But if he has any such Design he has, in my opinion, acted very impolitickly by making his appearance in England, since neither his address or Abilities can possibly recommend him to so high an office.

I acknowledge, for I will do him all Justice, he made a tolerable Pedagogue in the Grammar School of our College. Here he ought to have continued; but unfortunately, for his Reputation, as well as for the College, he was removed from the only Place he had abilities to Fill, to be President of the College. This laid the Foundation, for his other Exaltations; and, by a Syco-phantic Behaviour, he had accumulated upon him, the Rectorship of Bruton Parish, the office of Bishop's Commissary, of a Councillor, of a Judge of the General Court, and of Ordinary of Newgate. All which offices he now possesses except that of attending the Condemned Criminals, in the Public Goal, which he resigned upon his leaving the Colony. Was his Sincerity & abilities equal to his good Fortune, he would be one of the most accomplished men amongst us. But he is not content with an accumulation of Preferments; he is attempting to Soar Higher, by setting all America into Flame, in which perhaps he may be made the First Sacrifice. But I have dwelt long enough upon such a character.

By the enclosed Sheet of the House of Burgesses Journals containing their address in answer to the President's Speech at the opening of the last assembly, you will see the Sentiments the Country entertained of our late Governor. But the assembly were not content with demonstrating their Gratitude to the memory of that excellent man, by verbal declarations only; they have showed it by a more substantial Evidence. A very elegant Statue, of him, is to be erected, at the Public Expence, with

proper Inscriptions expressing the grateful Sense this Country entertained of his Lordship's prudent and wise administration; and their great Solicitude to perpetuate, as far as they are able, the Remembrance of those many Public & Social Virtues which adorned his illustrious character. These are the words of the Resolution. The Motion for this Statue was no sooner made, than an universal Plaudit rung through the House of Burgesses; and the cry was AGREED NEMINE CONTRA DISENTE. So high does the memory of this worthy man stand in the opinion of this Country. No certain Sum is appropriated for this Statue. It is to be sent for to Great Brtain under the direction of six Gentlemen who are to have it executed by the best Statuary in England, that it may be an Ornament to our Capital, where it is to be Fixed, and a lasting & elegant Testimony that this Country will ever pay the most distinguished Regard and Veneration to Governors of Worth and Merit.

You do, I doubt not, think me very talkative; but have a little more patience, and I will give you no further trouble at this Time. Pray what is become of Mountague our late agent? I suppose he takes his removal in great dudgeon. I confess I had some share in displacing him. I cannot recollect a single Instance in which he was serviceable to this Country and I think it useless & unjust to our selves, to continue him longer in office. His salary did not expire 'till the 10th of April last, and yet he has given us no account of the acts passed and transmitted to England twelve months before that time, altho' some of them were of considerable Importance, particularly the Burgesses Act, & that for preventing the Exorbitant exactions of the Public Collectors, on which we had our hearts greatly Fixed. Is not this an Evidence of great neglect in him? Let me whisper some thing in your Ear, which perhaps will be no disadvantage to you. I expect an attempt will be made the next Session to continue Montague agent; I am convinced the Interest that will support him is not strong enough to get him continued. But I believe an agent will certainly be appointed. Suppose then you should exert your self in procuring the Royal Assent to those Favorite acts which are now before the Board of Trade, and should transmit them by the very First opportunity. Such a Service let me tell you will do you no Injury in the opinion of



our Burgesses; and might pave the way for your Friends exerting themselves in your Behalf. At the worst, the Expence will not be great which I am convinced the Burgesses will repay you. A Word to the wise is sufficient

We know nothing as yet of our new Governor's coming amongst us. Some times it is said he will come; at other times that he will not. We entertain a very disadvantageous Opinion of him from the accounts brought to us from New York. I will tell you one of his Exploits which Wood, member for Frederick County, who you know, brought to the Assembly from New York from whence he had just returned. His Lordship with a Set of his Drunken Companions Sallied about midnight from his Palace and attacked Chief Justice Horsmanden's Coach and Horses. The Coach was destroyed and the Poor Horses lost their Tails. The next day the Chief Justice applied to Government for Redress. And a Proclamation issued by advice of the Council offering a reward of £200 for a discovery of the Principal in this violent act. We have not heard whether the Governor demanded the Reward. I have a mighty inclination the substance of this Letter (contained between the two lines in the margent from the first to the seventh page) should appear in some of the Public Papers in England. If you think the language will bare printing I give you leave to make that part of it public, for I am mighty desirous the Clergy's Scheme for an American Bishop should be made as public as possible to stir up an opposition to it from the Dissenters who will be terribly scourged by the Ecclesiastical Floggers, as the act of Toleration is not in Force in this Country. I am, Dear Sir,

Your very affectionate Servant,

RICHARD BLAND.

NOTE.—If you send any part of it to the Press you need not publish my name. Let the address also appear in the Public Papers.